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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BASRAH 000043

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: GOOD GUYS AND BAD GUYS ON THE BASRAH PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

REF: A) BASRAH 36, B) BASRAH 19, C) 05 BASRAH 153, D) BASRAH 29, E) BASRAH 30;
F) 05 BASRAH 157, G) BASRAH 36

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO BASRAH,
DEPARTMENT OF STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The current structure of Basrah politics allows religious extremism to flourish. In order to survive in the Basrah political scene today, political figures must portray themselves as devout Shia to the public. A small number of extremists on the Basrah Provincial Council have been able to hijack the legislative process to push through an agenda of anti-Coalition sentiment, authoritarianism, and an increasingly fundamentalist Islamic regulation of society. The few influential political moderates on the Basrah Provincial Council are those who are able to draw upon their religious background or religious family connections as a source of political power. Influential leaders in the Basrah community outside of the Council will be discussed in septel. End Summary.

Few Movers and Shakers on the Basrah Provincial Council

¶2. (C) Mired in in-fighting, the 41 members of the Basrah Provincial Council have scarcely managed to meet, let alone enact much useful legislation during the first three months of ¶2006. The political party breakdown of the BPC is as follows: six Da'awa party members, three SCIRI/Badr members, 11 Fadillah party members, 15 independent Islamic Coalition members, two Future of Iraq Assembly party members, and four Iraqi National Accord party members. (Comment: Discrepancy in the numbers of members in each party as per Basrah 41 is due to several "independents" of the Islamic Coalition known to have strong ties to either the Da'awa or SCIRI/Badr parties. End Comment.)

¶3. (C) Although all but four members of the BPC are from Unified Iraqi Coalition (List 555) parties, there is little agreement or cohesion between these members, and significant disagreements exist among members of the same party. Chairman Mohammed Saadon Sahed Al Obadi (Da'awa) has isolated himself from many of the other members by continuously declaring boycotts on communications with Coalition partners and on the British in particular, thereby hampering the Reconstruction and Development Committee and the Security Committee in their efforts to improving the infrastructure and security situation in Basrah. Even other Da'awa party members have confided in REO poloffs that they privately do not agree with the Chairman's policies but will not refute them in public (Reftel A).

¶4. (C) Of the 41 members, three members in particular stand out for being particularly unhelpful in their extremist and anti-Coalition platforms.

¶5. (C) Chairman Mohammed Saadon Sahed Al Obadi (Da'awa), despite his sterling reputation gained from being imprisoned during the former regime, is a weak political leader who has not been able to control the unruly council. Since September 2005, he has taken an increasingly anti-MNF-I stance, imposing a boycott on communications with Coalition partners and the British on three separate occasions (Reftel B). These boycotts enhance the Chairman's image as a strongman who is not afraid to stand up to the Coalition. Other council members admit that the boycotts have backfired, blocking progress in the development and security of Basrah.

¶6. (C) The Chairman has proven to be beyond the reach of reasonable discussion. At meetings with REO staff, he degenerates into ranting monologues after a few minutes. Other council members present at meetings with him ignore his rages. In December 2005, the Chairman put in place regulations requiring that all routine paperwork and correspondence pass through his hands for personal clearance, an authoritarian move that further isolated him from other BPC members and resulted in an increased decline in productivity. The dysfunctionality of the BPC is not entirely the responsibility of the Chairman - the council is so divided that it would not function well even with expert leadership - but a more competent political leader would have been able to guide the BPC through differences and effect change in Basrah for the better.

¶7. (C) Governor Mohammed Moassibh Al Wah'il (Fadillah) is best described as a duplicitous crook whose primary goal is personal enrichment (Reftel C). The internal affairs division of the Iraqi police, which he was forced to disband in November 2005, functioned as a private militia that took orders directly from the Governor, bypassing rule of law and the chain of command in

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the police. Fadillah party adherents also work in various other units in the police force and the Facilities Protection Service and act as an unofficial militia for the party. A compromise candidate for governor in January 2005, Governor Mohammed secured his current position because he was neither strong enough nor extreme enough to worry either OMS or SCIRI. Since then, however, he has shown decidedly Sadrist tendencies, appearing in public with Moqtada al Sadr during a February 26 visit to Basrah (Reftel D). Though he publicly states that the current boycott against the Coalition is none of his doing, he has taken no action to stop them.

¶8. (C) Khazl Jaloob Falih, aka Abu Salam (Fadillah) also falls into the category of "Basrah Bad Boys" for his extremist views, anti-Coalition viewpoints, and his platform of fundamentalist Islam. Described as a "simple man" by some REO contacts and as an out-and-out criminal by others, he dominates discussions in the BPC. By using extremist Islamic rhetoric, he has been able to hijack dialogue in the BPC on much legislation, denouncing BPC members who question him. REO contacts describe Abu Salam as gaining in political power within the Fadillah party (Reftel E) and as the real power behind the Governor.

The Good Guys

¶9. (C) The few political moderates on the council who are influential enough to counter the extremists are those who have a religious reputation, or are known as charitable individuals who have donated generously from their personal finances, rendering them immune to attacks from fundamentalist extremists. The most influential of the political moderates is Seyid Baha Ahmed Jamal Al Deen (Da'awa), a Shia Imam from a well-known and respected family. Seyid Baha managed a non-governmental charity

organization before being elected to the council, and he has an untouchable reputation as a religious man who cares for the poor and needy. His interest in serving the people, as opposed to using his position to pillage for profit, is clear. He maintains open lines of communication with Coalition partners and has expressed interest in mounting projects to employ poor people in Basrah.

¶10. (C) Seyid Gali Najem Muter (Iraqi National Accord) is a secular political moderate who is not afraid to voice his own opinions in public (see reftel F for more background on Gali). He commands considerable public support and respect. His religious background as a descendant of the prophet makes his message on the secular separation of religion from government all the more powerful. His personable demeanor and charisma have won him much public sympathy. Known to crack jokes during council sessions, Gali is one of the few council members able to break tensions and move negotiations forward. When he talks, people listen. He has told REO staff that he would like to start a project on public information to educate the public on important issues leading up to the provincial elections.

¶11. (C) Dr. Wathib Salman Al Gamud (Da'awa) also has a sterling reputation in Basrah as an educated doctor who has used his wealth to found an orphanage in the city (see reftel G for more background on Dr. Wathib). As a British citizen who spent over 20 years in Great Britain during the Saddam years, Dr. Wathib must deal with being seen as someone who deserted Iraq during the hard times and came back when he stood to gain politically. Nevertheless, he exerts considerable clout in the local community and has learned how to work the system for international support.

¶12. (C) Of the female BPC members, many are moderate but few stand up and voice opposition to extremists. Two of the more vocal female candidates, Jenan Abdul Jabbar Yassin (Da'awa) and Haifa Malij Jaafir (Islamic independent) were elected as national parliamentarians in the December 15 election and will be replaced at the provincial level.

¶13. (C) One woman who has the political and religious authority to push back in council sessions is Dr. Seknaa Falak Al Malkee (Independent). She is from a well-known and well-respected religious family in Zubair. Her youngest brother, Sheikh Mohamed Falik, is a cleric who represents Ayatollah Sistani in Zubair. Both Dr. Seknaa and her brother are active in their charity organization that provides assistance to widows, orphans, and poor families. Her religious character is untouchable, and when she speaks in council sessions, the religious authority of the Ayatollah is in everyone's minds. Intelligent and active in her own right, Dr. Seknaa is a legitimate political figure who would do well regardless of her family connections. In the cutthroat environment of the BPC today, however, Dr. Seknaa's connections are the only thing that keeps her afloat in a rising tide of religious extremism on the council.

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Comment

¶14. (C) The streets of Basrah pile up with garbage and the security situation in the city spirals downward as council members bicker and plot against each other. The "holier than thou" attitude that the majority Shia party members on the council have taken in order to push through personal agendas, rather than thoughtful legislation, has turned the political battleground into one where minority parties representing Sunni, Christian, and secular interests stand little chance of success. At best, the Iraqi National Accord may be able maintain the same small number of seats it now has on the Council in the next provincial election. It is entirely possible that only Shia political parties will be represented on the council in the future. Shia political moderates with strong religious backgrounds are the only political moderates in Basrah who will

realistically be able to compete with the extremists in the next provincial election.
GROSS